

**THE PITIFULNESS OF THE LORD—
THE COMFORT OF THE AFFLICTED
NO. 1845**

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 14, 1885,
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ON BEHALF OF THE LONDON HOSPITALS.**

*“Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”
James 5:11.*

WE are far too apt to entertain hard thoughts of God. The horrible atheism of our depraved nature continually quarrels with the Most High, and when we are under His afflicting hand, and things go cross to our will, the evil of our nature becomes sadly evident. When sorely distressed, we are too apt to think and to speak as we ought not to do concerning the Most High. Let us never forget that our hard speeches have all been false speeches, and that our suspicions of our God have always been libels upon Him. When we have not thought and spoken well of His name, we have thought and spoken amiss.

Looking back, we desire, if possible, to blot out every murmuring thought with our tears, and we would cancel every complaining word with humble sorrow. We would eat our bitter words. They were all unwarranted, and therefore with deep repentance we call them back. On taking a survey of our whole life, we see that the kindness of God has run all through it like a silver thread. Goodness and mercy have followed us all our days, ever pursuing us even when we have wickedly fled from them.

Even our apparent ills have been real blessings. As I said in prayer, so I say now, I do not know for which I would bless God most, for my sorrows or for my joys. The best piece of furniture I have ever had in my house is the cross of affliction. Adversity is the richest field in all the farm of life. We have never reaped such a harvest from any seed as from that which fell from our hand while tears were falling from our eyes. When we have gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, we have invariably come again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us.

O you sufferer, when your bed grew hard beneath you, and your pain was exceeding great, it may be that your groans and complaints were not altogether those of sorrow, but a measure of rebellion mingled with them. For this be ashamed and confounded. Confess those rebellions, acknowledge that your hard thoughts were all founded upon error, and ask for grace to be henceforth at one with your Lord.

You who have suffered the loss of property or the loss of beloved friends, you, too, perhaps have thought of God foolishly. Remember those thoughts with shame, and be all the more eager at once to bear willing testimony that the Lord is good, and that His mercy endures forever.

It is true, however circumstances may look otherwise, that “the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Whatever may or may not be, the Lord must be good. Set your seal to that truth. Hold up your head and your hand as one who can speak well of His name, and say, “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

Let each restored man say, “He heals all my diseases.” Let each tried one now say, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all.” Let the aged man bring the spoils of his experience and lay them down at the feet of the Lord who hitherto has helped him. Our desire this morning will be to help one another to avoid future murmurings. We have really nothing to complain about, even our disappointments will yet be causes for praise.

O, may the Spirit of God now make us wise to avoid such hasty blunders in the future, and teach us to know the Lord so well that we may henceforth be at peace with Him, whatever He may do! O that we may never bear false witness against our God. The apostle James in this passage aims at setting us right in our judgments of the Lord's dealings, that patience may become an easier lesson.

Will you notice that the apostle, first, in this verse, *cites an instructive instance* of the tender pitifulness of God, "Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." Then, secondly, *he makes a consoling statement*, and lays it down as a matter of doctrine that "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." When we have talked upon those two matters, we shall close by observing *the precious lessons* which we ought to gather from them, as bees fetch honey from the flowers.

I. Notice that when James is exhorting us to full confidence in God in the hour of trial, he gives us AN INSTRUCTIVE INSTANCE.

He quotes the story of Job. In these days everything is doubted, and a new theory is sure to run like fire among stubble, for this fickle age delights, like the Athenians, in everything new, however absurd it may be. Hence no part of Scripture has been left alone, and of the Book of Job it has been said that it is a drama, a fiction, a fine piece of Oriental imagination.

But see how the New Testament protects the Old. How can Job be an imaginary character? Does the Spirit of God quote for our guidance a fictitious personage? Does He set Job before us as an example when Job never existed? The thing is too absurd to contemplate for a single moment. There was such a person as Job, and possibly the present passage may confirm us in the belief that the patriarch lived in the earliest ages, since this apostle, when mentioning the prophets, places Job in the forefront of them, and quotes his case in preference to any other.

"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience...You have heard of the patience of Job." He might have mentioned Jacob, or Moses, or David, as examples of heroic endurance, but he cites Job, in all probability as being first in order of time and in degree of trial.

I conceive him to have been one of the earliest of those gracious personages who walked with God through much tribulation, and endured as seeing Him who is invisible. At any rate, we are certain that James does not bring before us the imaginary actor in an Oriental tale as an argument for patience. For when men are suffering they have no patience with fiction, they are in no humor for amusement, and suffering men will only endure to be comforted by the story of real persons who have literally known the sufferings of life.

Should you try to stimulate the afflicted to patience by a piece of fiction, they would turn upon you with indignation, and say, "Yes, you demand a patience of me which was never found in mortal man. You ask me to display a virtue which was never actually exemplified in history, and so you are driven to invent a personage for my imitation." It is too absurd.

Observe, that when this apostle introduces Job, it is with the view of pointing out the tender mercy of God in his case, and he begins by saying, "Behold, we count them happy which endure." The pitifulness and tender mercy of God are to be seen *in the happiness of those who are called to suffer*. "We count them happy which endure." Who counts them happy? It is a counting which is not general. This arithmetic is only known to faith, and must be learned of the Lord Jesus.

"We," that is, the church of God, count them happy who are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. We do not deem those to be happy who sport their lives away, and end a wasted life of luxury by a dreadful death in unbelief. We do not count those to be happy who are fattened like the beasts in the pasture, but shall soon be brought to the slaughter—such are all around us, but we sorrow because of them. We are not so foolish as to count those happy who spread themselves like a green bay tree, only to be the sooner laid low by the axe of doom.

We count those happy who endure, because our Savior has taught us so to reckon. Did He not say, "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against

you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”? Did He not also say, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”? This is the verdict of the Savior, and the true disciple must not dream of disputing with His Master. It is ours to believe that those who endure the will of God are among the happiest of the race, for the inspired Psalmist has said, “Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O LORD.”

I may venture to say that the more sensible part of mankind in some measure concur with the people of God in this accounting. We count that man happy who has passed through trial and hardship with a brave endurance. Such life is of an interesting and manly kind, but life without struggle and difficulty is thin and tasteless. How can a noble life be constructed if there be no difficulty to overcome, no suffering to bear? What was there about Dives, and his fine linen, and sumptuous fare, to make life of? Who envies him?

Studying the lives of eminent men, we come to the conclusion, that on the whole it is good for a man to bear the yoke—good for a man to breast the billows—good for a man to pass through fire and through water, and so to learn sublime lessons. When we see what poor, paltry things those are who are nursed in the lap of luxury, and consequently never come to a real manhood, “we count them happy that endure.”

No wise man would seek to be exempted from the healthy discipline of trouble, any more than an intelligent child would wish to be excused from school, and to be allowed to play all day and every day in the meadows. No, we are not butterflies that flit from flower to flower, life is real, life is earnest, and the tonic of sorrow braces and strengthens us to make it so. As a matter of faith, and even as a matter of reasonable judgment, “we count them happy which endure.”

This counting is not mere fancy, but it is a correct estimate. There is a happiness in affliction which none will doubt who have tasted it. Within the rough shell of sorrow we find a sweet kernel. When we look to the end of affliction, when we see all its comfortable fruit, when we mark what it corrects, and observe what it produces, we judge that it is no mean blessing. Happy is the man who has been enabled to endure. He rises from the deeps of woe like a pearl-finder from the sea, rich beyond comparison. He has gained more than he has lost, even though he has lost everything, if he has gained contentment, conformity to the will of God, a deep experience, and a surer hope.

Beloved, those of us who have done business upon great waters and have endured abundant pain count them happy that endure, even while they are enduring. The people of God find themselves more buoyant in the most salty seas of sorrow than in other waters. The cross does in very deed raise us nearer to Christ when it is fully sanctified. It could not do so if it were not sanctified by the Holy Spirit to that noble end. But under His hand it works out our lasting good. Rare gems glisten in the mines of adversity.

I believe that the child of God seldom trusts God so simply at other times as he does when he is in great trouble. Then the second causes are all knocked away like dog-shores from a new-built vessel, and the soul glides like a ship from the stocks into the waters of grace which are her element. Creatures too often come between us and the Creator, and when they are removed we see Him more distinctly, who to see is joy and peace.

We never get so near to the source of all heavenly consolation as when earthly comfort is removed far away. God seems never so much a husband to any as to the widow, and never so much a father as to the fatherless. Our Lord Jesus assures us that the rich man hardly enters the kingdom—the general truth which lies within that fact is this—the wealth which we possess, be it of what kind it may, impoverishes us by making faith more difficult, and it is only by faith that we enter the kingdom of God. It is hard to learn swimming on dry land, but he that is in the water is driven to strike out. Our troubles are such “waters to swim in.” We are obliged—strange that we should need such forcing to it—we are obliged, I say, to cast ourselves on God when other helpers fail. It is written, “Blessed is he that trusts in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.” Thus you see how sorrow compels us to the trust which makes us blessed, and thus you see why “we count them happy which endure.”

Endurance also works in the child of God a close clinging to God, which produces near and dear communion with Him. Have you not, in time of trouble, found yourself admitted to inner chambers, which aforetime had been closed to you? Oh, the rare fellowship of tried saints! Sorrows reveal to us the Man of Sorrows. Griefs waft us to the bosom of our God. See the little chicks in the sunshine, they are running all over the yard to gather what they can, but a hawk is in the sky, and the mother calls them with a sharp alarm. They perceive the danger, and now they thrust themselves into her feathers and are hidden beneath her wings. He was a much afflicted man who wrote, “He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you trust.”

The most delicious of sensations outside of heaven is to faint away upon the bosom of the Lord. We find strength in helplessness, joy in submission, rest in resignation, heaven in a full surrender. It is delightful to look up to a stripping and chastening God, and to say to Him, “My soul is even as a weaned child. Do what You will, for Your will is my will. I submit myself to the withdrawal of what has so long seemed the only source of my comfort and the fountain of my life, for You are better to me than all the breasts of consolation. I am sorely wounded, but You have done it, and You ever do well, therefore, I will take pleasure in the grief You send.” Beloved, that suffering which gives new life to prayer, and opens to us the palace gates through which we pass into diviner fellowship is so great a boon that “we count them happy which endure.”

Besides, the Lord has a choice way of manifesting Himself unto His servants in their times of weakness. I speak what I know, for I have trodden “that path which no bird of prey knows, neither has the falcon’s eye seen it”—the path upon which shines the inward personal revelation of God. He draws the curtain about the bed of His chosen sufferer, and at the same time He withdraws another curtain which aforetime concealed His glory. He takes away the delights of health and vigor, and then He implants energy of another and a higher order, so that the inner man waxes mighty while the outer man decays.

So wondrously does grace work beyond nature that it transfigures bodily sickness into spiritual health. Men of God have been known to cry, “Take me back to the furnace again, for there one like unto the Son of God was evidently with me.” When they have had solace in the creature, they have somewhat missed the sweetness of the Creator, and have sighed amid their earthly comforts for the loneliness which afforded them the nearer company of Jesus. I have never known more blissful seasons than those which my Lord vouchsafed me when I was abused by men, and had to fight a weary battle.

After all, there is no place in all our pilgrim ways which, taken for all in all, has all the charms of the Valley of Humiliation. The tops of the Delectable Mountains are royal spots, from thence we sometimes see the Golden City, but these are heights too steep for our trembling feet continually to stand upon. The lowly valley suits us better, though flesh and blood find it hard to go downhill. Here the herb called heart’s-ease grows luxuriantly, and he that wears it is happier than the courtier in silk and velvet. Delightful is that well-shaded valley, where the shepherd’s boy sits and sings among his father’s sheep—

*“He that is down need fear no fall;
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.”*

Bunyan truly says, “The Valley of Humiliation is of itself as fruitful a place as any the crow flies over.” Chiefly it is so because in its wildernesses the Lord speaks to our hearts. To His child when passing through the glens of tribulation the Lord says, “Certainly I will be with you.” In the furnace of affliction the Lord manifests Himself to His chosen as He does not to the world, yea, as He does not even to those of His people who are basking in prosperity. Therefore, “we count them happy which endure.”

Brethren, do you not see how this changes the face of affliction? This brightens everything, for if it is, in the judgment of those who have experienced it, a happy thing to endure, then it is true that “the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

Further, the apostle gives us a hint of another matter. He adds, “You have heard of the patience of Job.” Now, notice here, *the notability*—I had almost said the *nobility*—of *endurance*. As one truly says, Job’s bones had lain this day in the common morgue of oblivion if it had not been for his sufferings and his patience. “You have heard of the patience of Job.” Who has not?

But you would have never heard of Job if he had always been prosperous. His flocks and his herds, his gold and his silver, his children and their banquets, would none of them have earned immortality for his name, but his poverty and his sickness have done it. He had been simply an Oriental sheik, honored in his own day, but forgotten like his fellows, had not the malice of Satan and the grace of God forced him into notice. He was knighted on the battlefield. The stream of time has rolled over every other prince of his age, and we have never heard of them, but “you have heard of the patience of Job.” Who gets a patent of nobility from the throne of God unless it be by endurance? The names of the heroes of the cross are written in black ink with a heavy pen.

Even in worldly histories it is by enduring hardness that men build their memorials. Who that has read the classics has not heard of Mutius Scaevola? and why? He was a valiant man, but he did not win his name by a common deed in battle. His fights are unrecorded, but you have heard of his laying his right hand upon the burning coals of an altar, to let Porsenna see how a Roman could endure pain without shrinking. When he suffered his right hand to burn he was writing his name in his country’s annals.

A thousand instances prove that only by endurance can names be graven in the brass of history. To make a man a man, to bring his manhood forward, and to make other men see it, there must be endurance. Read the lives of any who have become the leaders of our race, read the stories of any that are written in the bead-roll of fame, and you shall find that not without trial did they come to be renowned.

Poor tailors, husbandmen, and apprentices live in the story of the church because they counted not their lives dear to them for Christ’s sake. Simple maids and wives, unlettered and poor, are heard of to this day, and shall be heard of in eternity, because they were burned as martyrs for the truth. Who would have heard of Ann Askew if it were not that she was put upon the rack, and when every bone was out of joint and all her body was in exquisite torture, she baffled her tormentors. Well did she say—

*“I am not she that list
My anchor to let fall
For every drizzling mist;
My ship’s substantial.”*

She that could suffer and sing gained high rank among “the ladies of the covenant.” He who is content to go down to a dishonorable grave may choose the bastard’s portion, and escape the rod, but the true-born child of God has no such desire. You may, if you please, enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, but if God intends to honor you, you will choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.

If you would reign in Christ’s kingdom you must drink of His cup, and be baptized with His baptism. Do not therefore look down upon those who suffer, but rather look up to them as among the higher classes of our race. The trials of Job elevated him into the peerage of the saints, and therefore we gather from this honorable result of endurance, “that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy,” when He sends afflictions to His beloved ones.

Once again, in order to see the pity of God in sorrow, we must *see the Lord’s end in it*, for, says the Apostle, “You have seen the end of the Lord.” God’s end in affliction is that which proves that He is

very pitiful and of tender mercy. Does it not strike you as rather a singular thing that when James wants to show us that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy, he points us to Job on a dunghill, with all his property gone, with his children dead, with his wife ill-advising him, with his friends provoking him, and himself covered with sore blains from head to foot? Who can see the pitifulness and tender mercy of God there? Nobody that is blind, but he who has had his eyes opened by the Spirit of God can see it there, because he does not look so much at the process as at the result. He stays not with the crucible and the furnace, but joyously gazes upon the pure gold which comes from the refining pot. We see not so much *how* grace works as *what* it works. The design of the Lord is more to be noted than the method He pursues.

First, remember that the Lord's end in sending affliction to His people is corrective. Sanctified sorrow is a sharp frost which kills the germs of spiritual disease. Our griefs, like a hailstorm, break off the buds from the branches of sin, so that they do not produce the black, accursed fruit of actual transgression. How much we owe to the knife which cuts out the canker and the gangrene! Christ's vines would soon be in an evil case if it were not for the pruner. Let us bless God that though before we were afflicted we went astray, yet now, by the sanctifying processes of His providence and grace, we have learned to keep His Word. Look at the corrective influence of sorrow, and you will not quarrel with the rod in a father's hands.

Moreover, affliction is sent for the display of grace. Our graces lie asleep within us like slumbering soldiers until affliction strikes its terrible drum, and awakens them. You shall not know that there is a bird in the woods if you are quiet, but if you break a bough they will become visible, and thus affliction, passing through our soul, startles all our graces, and we perceive them, and God is honored thereby. You cannot see the stars while the sun shines. Wait till it is dark, and then you shall behold them. And many a Christian grace is quite imperceptible until the time of trial, and then it shines out with great luster.

All this supposes that grace is there, but if it be wanting, trial discovers the lack. You know not what spirit you are of till you have been under tribulation. You count yourself rich, but in the fire your gold is tested. You reckon that your house is well-built, but the flames find out the wood, and hay, and stubble. Self-knowledge is never sure if it comes not of tests and temptations. Therefore, we count them happy that endure, because they are less likely to be deceived. God is to be praised for the discovery of our graces, for thus affliction becomes a blessing without disguise.

Further, our trials are an education for the future. I do not think Job was fit to have any more substance until his heart had been enlarged by trouble, then he could bear twice as much as before. A man of God is not prepared to enjoy success till he has tasted defeat. Many an heir of heaven will never be fit for heaven till first of all he has been brought near to the gates of hell. You have been strengthened and prepared and made ready for a nobler future by your late experience of grief.

A traveler said to me yesterday, speaking of the heat, how different it is from cold, for the more you suffer heat the less you can endure it, but the more you are tried with cold the more you can bear it, for it hardens you. I am sure it is so as to the influences of prosperity and adversity. Prosperity softens and renders us unfit for more of itself, but adversity braces the soul, and hardens it to patience.

Beloved, I would not have you forget that "the end of the Lord" is always with His tried people to give them greater happiness as the result of it. Job's double portion was an instructive type of what God does with His children in some form or other after trial. "You have seen the end of the Lord." Job came to the end of his words with great bitterness and sorrow of heart, but God's end was not yet, but when it came it was glorious and full of joy for His servant.

Mark in Job 31:40, it is written, "The words of Job are ended," ended amid thistles and cockle, but the end of the Lord was very different, for He loaded His servant with pieces of money and earrings of gold, and blessed his latter end more than his beginning. Your end, O you that are tossed with tempest and not comforted, shall come forth from your God when He shall lay your stones with fair colors and your foundations with sapphire. He will restore your soul even in this life, and give you joy and rest out of your sorrow.

As for the life to come, how little do we take it into our estimate! It is as the main ocean, and this life is no better than the village brook. The sorrows of time are a mere pin's prick at the most, if we contrast them with the joy eternal. What shall we think of these temporary inconveniences when we reach eternal felicity? We shall look back upon our passing grief with wonder that we ever made so much of it. When the sunshine bursts upon us we shall smile to think of the flying clouds. We shall laugh to think that we were so depressed by our light affliction, which is but for a moment. The far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory will cause us to despise the trivial trials of our mortal life. All this makes me say, and makes you see, that the end of the Lord is love, and that in the trouble which He sends He is still "very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

II. Secondly, OUR APOSTLE MAKES A CONSOLING STATEMENT, "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

Observe that this is the teaching of God's holy Word, and therefore if we have at this moment no evidence of it perceptible to sight or sense, *we are bound to believe it* all the same. I ask the child of God to settle this in his mind. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." Though as for me, "my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped," yet surely God is good to His own people.

Whatever appears to conflict with this, nothing can possibly shake the certainty of this fact, that "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." O weeping heir of heaven, though your Father scourge you believe this, for He scourges every son whom He receives, and this also is true, that He receives every son whom He scourges. Rest your heart upon this. Do not be persuaded by man or devil to think ill of your God. He has a father's heart even when He makes you feel the strokes of His hand. Your God cannot be unkind to you. He cannot forsake you. Has He not said, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget you"?

*"Such pity as a father has
Unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such
As worship Him in fear."*

Believe you this?

But, further, the text tells us that *this truth may be seen*, and though it is a matter of faith, yet it may be also a matter of sight. "You have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful," this is so plain that you can see it. See, then, the pitifulness of God in upholding His people under trouble. He presses down with one hand, but He lifts up with the other. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion." His dealings with us are of the nature of the raindrop and the sunbeam—these are united in fashioning the covenant rainbow. Beloved, it is true, the Lord has burdened you—is it not also true that He has sustained you? Above is the billow, but "underneath are the everlasting arms." See the pitifulness of God in this!

How often the mercy of God is seen in sickness and suffering by His mitigating the pain and loss! One ounce more and the back had broken, but that ounce never came. One breath more and the ship that even then staggered before the gale would have been driven to the bottom of the sea, but that breath of wind did not come. There is always a restraining of affliction, even in the hour of severest trial. Those who are washed in the blood of Jesus shall never be drowned in the sea of sorrow.

Observe also the tender pity of God in forgiving the sin of His suffering people. I bless the Lord that He has not taken notice of what I have thought and said when I have been greatly depressed and distracted by pain. Our Lord knows that the spirit is willing even when the flesh is weak, and He thinks kindly of us still. If He did mark my foolish despondencies, what could I say but, "Lord, have mercy upon Your foolish child"?

When your child has a fever, it may be he is fretful, and begins to talk foolishly. Maybe he says unkind things against those very persons whom in his heart he loves best. Do you ever say to the child

afterwards, “John, I am very grieved that you said such shocking things about me and about your mother”? Far from it, you say, “Poor dear, he does not know what he is talking about. He is wandering in his mind.” So does God deal with our naughtiness when we are under His hand, when He sees that it is rather weakness than willfulness. He is very pitiful and full of compassion, and blots out the transgressions of His people.

See how the tenderness and pitifulness of God are also seen in the revelations He makes to His saints, but of that I have spoken, though I would not have you forget it.

So also in the overruling of our sorrows His love is conspicuous. He often sends a great sorrow that we may not be compelled to bear a greater one. By fire He prevents conflagration, by pain He kills a greater pain. If you had not endured a certain trouble you might have been visited by seven troubles, each one more terrible than your present one. Thank God for the preventive operations of His providence!

Bless Him, above all, for the sweet rewards that come to His tried people when afterwards they bear the comfortable fruits of righteousness, and especially when He comes to them in the riches of His grace, and turns their midnight into everlasting day.

In closing the second head I should like to say I wish we could all read the original Greek, for this word, “The Lord is very pitiful,” is an especially remarkable one. It means literally that the Lord has “many bowels,” or a great heart, and so it indicates great tenderness. The God in whom some believe is unable to feel. They lay it down in their theology as an axiom that God cannot feel. This, however, I take leave to deny. God is able to do all things. I cannot regard Him as though He were a block of wood, or a mass of iron, unable to feel.

On the contrary, He is represented to us as greatly feeling; the God of many bowels. You know how a sensitive person is affected at the sight of suffering. Some persons cannot bear to see a creature in pain. They are unmanned thereby, and begin to weep like children. Our God is not only full of pity, but *very* full of pity—not only of mercy, but of *tender* mercy. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was here on earth, was the image of the Father, and we read of Him often that “He was moved with compassion.” After this sort are we to think of the great God who is full of heart towards suffering men.

The other word is the complement of the first—“and of tender mercy.” There is then, you see, in these two words, pity for misery and mercy for sin. There is inward pity in the heart of God, and outward action in the mercy of God. There is sympathy for suffering, and grace for guilt. These two things make up what we want. That God should, pity our griefs and forget our sins, that God should think kindly of us, and act helpfully towards us—these are our greatest needs.

What a sea of goodness is in my text, “very pitiful, and of tender mercy!” Believe you, then, of God, and see it to be true, that for the woes of man He has a tender heart. Forget not that word, “In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.” Our God is not cold and hard, but very full of pity. He is infinitely just, and will assuredly punish sin, but side by side with His justice stands His love! He is as full of pity as if He had forgotten to be righteous, indeed, He is much more so, for were He less righteous He would be less kind. If you would see His goodness and His justice blended, behold the Son of God upon the tree, dying in our stead. Never doubt His tenderness who gave His Only-begotten Son, “that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

III. Now I have to close with THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED out of the whole subject. I will but hint at them.

The first is *be patient*. The whole context teaches us patience. Read the chapter at home, and see how James continues to say, “Be patient.” Be patient for this reason, that God “is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” A person going to a surgeon will bear sharp pain when he is convinced that by such pain his cure will be wrought. If a man proposes to gash me with a lancet, I decline his offer. But if I know that I shall die unless the incision be made, and if I believe that an intolerable pain will thus be assuaged, I say, “Welcome the knife.” Let him cut without mercy, if by it he intends mercy. It might be unmerciful to stay the hand in such a case.

Such knowledge should make us patient under divine chastisement. The Lord never grieves us because He likes to grieve us. “He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” There is a need for every sorrow. Though now for a season we are in heaviness, there is a necessity for it. Do not kick against the goad, lest it prick you all the more. Be you silent before God, lest He rebuke you for your foolish speech.

When the sheep is being shorn, if it kicks it will be cut with the shears, but if it will lie quite still, the shearer will take off all the wool and never harm the flesh. Lie still, brother, let the Good Shepherd clip as He pleases, though He may cut very close to the skin, He is very pitiful and will only rid you of that which would harm you.

The next lesson is, *be penitent*. You unconverted ones here today, if you are suffering and sorrowful, I want you to feel that God is sending this sorrow in love to your souls. He smites you that you may turn to Him in repentance. He chastens you that He may bring you to Himself, that you may not perish forever. He “is very pitiful.” His hand is strong to smite, but it is also strong to save.

Return to your Father, O you prodigal. Though you have spent your substance, though you have brought yourself to rags, return to your Father. There is bread enough in His house, and better still, there is love enough in His heart to welcome even you. See, He hastens to meet you as soon as your face is toward Him, for He is ready to forgive. Oh, you that have been hardened by your distresses, repent of this wickedness, lest, like Pharaoh, you are plagued even to destruction. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. He welcomes all who repent, He is eager to forgive, delay no longer. O Spirit of the Lord, hasten the returning sinner!

The last lesson is, *be full of pity*. If God is full of pity and of tender mercy, children of God, you are to imitate Him, and to be full of pity, too. This truth is to be remembered at all times, but just now you have an opportunity of showing your pity towards the poor and sick of this great city. When you relieve the wants of a man in health you may possibly assist him in his vices, but in helping the sick poor you can do no wrong.

The door of a hospital is open for good, and only for good. I am concerned to know that there are many beds unoccupied and many suffering persons kept out of the hospitals from lack of funds. Whole wards are rendered useless for lack of income. In some cases the authorities are compelled to use those wards for persons who can pay for attendance, and though this is a good thing, yet I cannot forget that those who cannot pay are thus deprived of what they need so much more than others.

You that have been sick yourselves should give liberally today out of sympathy. You that have never been sick ought to give twice as much out of gratitude. Yet I must correct myself, those who have been afflicted and healed should feel both sympathy and gratitude, and so should give the double of those from whom I have asked double liberality. Let us try to give to this fourfold degree. When the box is passed round, be full of pity and of tender mercy, like your Father and your God, and then the hospitals will be largely helped this day.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 103

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—103 (VERSION 3), 214, 195

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